

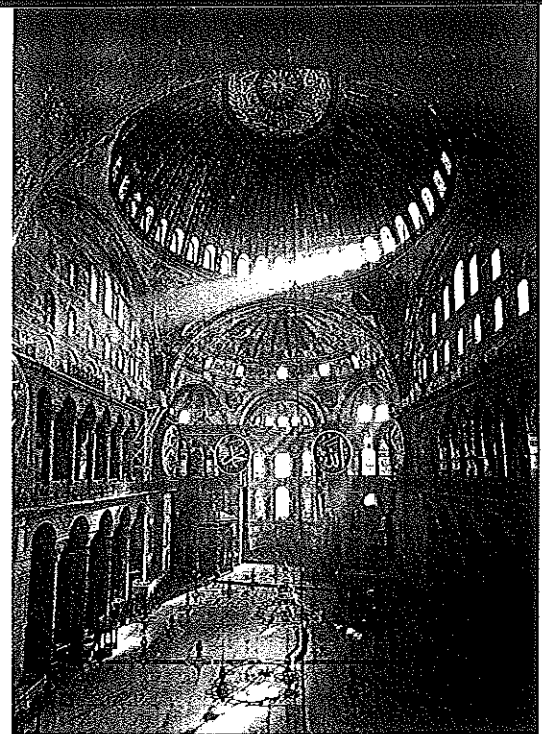
Performing the Sacred in Byzantium

Image, breath and sound

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Figure 1. Hagia Sophia, 532-537 and 562, interior.
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A twenty-first century audience approaches the concept of 'image' as 'representation' and as such it sustains the continuity of the term's meaning from the ancient Greco-Roman tradition to the present. Art history further fosters the same line of thinking because it conceives of images primarily as pictorial representations. Being an art historian and a Byzantinist, I will challenge this identification by showing how Christian theologians in late antiquity severed 'image' from representation and sought to promote an alternative model linked to performance and ritual enactment (Pentcheva forthcoming b). The story of Adam in Genesis (Genesis 1:25-6, 2:7) offers the ontological platform of the performative image; the first human is allegedly made of inert matter quickened into life by divine breath. Greek further connects 'breath' to 'Holy Spirit', for it designates both with the same word – *pneuma*. I call this Christian form of iconicity 'performative'. Yet, I do not use the term in the same way as performance studies scholars do; they associate it with speech-act theory or its later uses especially in gender studies (Austin 1962; Butler 1999). By contrast, I employ 'performative' as a marker of the process through which the inanimate starts to be perceived as alive and this liveliness is manifested in the change of appearance such as glitter, reverberation, phenomenal shadow, smoke. As such my use of 'performative' engages the spatial and temporal aspects of the liturgical ritual of in-spiriting and recognizes the synergistic role the viewing/participating subject plays in engendering the perceived animation of the inert. My analysis probes further into the image-making operations of *pneuma* activated



by the Byzantine liturgy. In uncovering the medieval non-representational 'performative' image, this paper will show how iconicity becomes the product of the mouth and breath (inhalation and exhalation). Through chant, I will approach the body of the faithful and the material fabric of the building as instruments of breath and slowly shift an art historical discourse to musicology, entering the domain where modulated breath exhaled in chant stirs the acoustics of the space, producing a sentient, yet ineffable, presence of divinity. By turning to phenomenology of sound and the sixth-century church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople (modern Istanbul, Turkey), this study uncovers the role of chant in engendering the sacred, transforming both singers and listeners into 'icons of God'. So what Byzantium offers us today is an access to a culture that defined the process of image-making not as an artistic modelling of representational mimesis, but as a sensually saturated experience of the divine accessible to both actors (that is, singers) and audience (that is, congregation).

For the past decade my work has uncovered and explored the phenomenon of animation in Byzantine art (Pentcheva 2010, 2006). My focus has been the mixed-media relief icon (here 'image' understood as a portrait and representation). I have argued that its rich material texture of gold filigree, glass mosaic and enamel is optically polymorphous. These complex surfaces become alive with the changes

of diurnal light, flickering candle lights, drafts of air and human breath. Rather than a *chiaroscuro* pictorial modelling, it is temporal glitter and transient shadows that create a sense of movement in the image and endow it with liveliness.¹ Only recently, I have recognized how the same phenomenon of animation elicited by shifting diurnal light and oil lamps is operating in the interior of Hagia Sophia, transforming the inert into vibrant matter (Pentcheva 2010: 45–56). Medieval ekphraseis of the Great Church record how the phenomenal glitter of the interior was perceived as the visual marker of the ephemeral presence of the Holy Spirit (Pentcheva 2011). Moreover, they connected light with sound and more specifically water. In Greek the word for glitter – ‘*marmarygma*’ – derives from ‘marble’ – ‘*marmaron*’ – and ‘quivering water’ – ‘*marmairousa*’ – and, thus, coruscation was synaesthetically linked to the movement, liveliness and associated with the murmur of the sea. The visual aspect of sparkling water brought out an auditory equivalent. The extremely reverberant acoustics of Hagia Sophia of circa twelve seconds shaped the experience of the interior and linked the imputed divine presence reifying during the liturgy as ‘the sound of many waters’ (Pentcheva 2011).

My research focus has shifted to chant as the agency transforming human bodies into ‘images of God’. The production of this ‘performative’ image has both spatial and temporal dimensions that relate directly to the main theme of the Performance Studies international (PSi) Conference in 2013. In excavating the Byzantine conceptualization and staging of the ‘performative image of God’, my aim is to make relevant to a new audience the significance and complexity of the medieval image-making as a process of in-spiriting matter.

THE MATERIAL FABRIC: HAGIA SOPHIA AND ITS INTERIOR

Living in the age of the virtual and digital, our bodies are denied the type of sensual immersion in the sacred that Byzantine culture by contrast offered through spaces such as the church

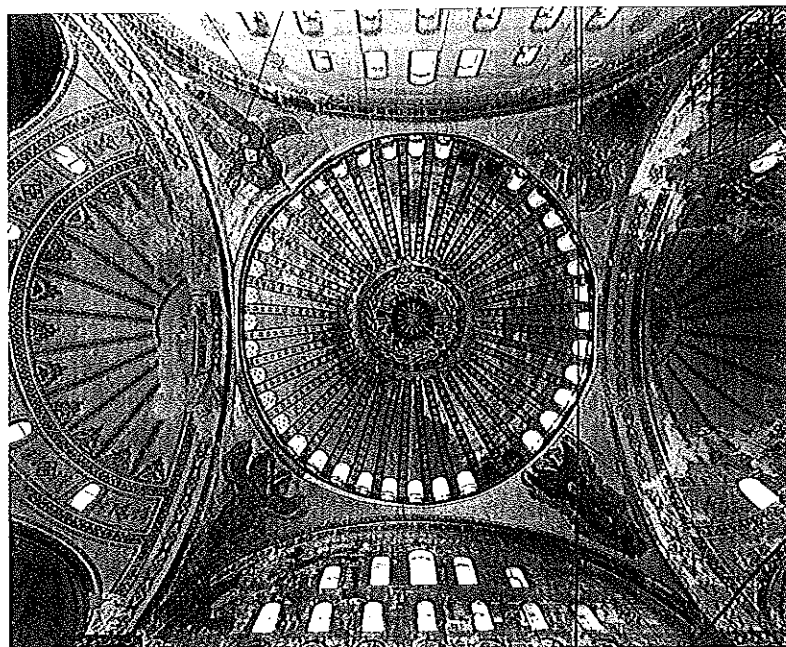
of Hagia Sophia, built by emperor Justinian in 532–7 CE. The Great Church marks the importance of the city of Constantinople as the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, known as Byzantium. Rising on a high ground overlooking the Bosphorus, Hagia Sophia’s exterior emerges in a series of cascading domes and semi-domes, shouldered by robust buttresses. Yet, from its conception, the building was meant to dazzle with its interior (fig. 1). Surrounded by colonnaded aisles and galleries, its nave extends more than seventy metres in length. The walls and floor are decked in variegated marbles and gold mosaic.

The original sixth-century monumental decorative programme is entirely non-figural, displaying just geometric and vegetal patterns. Only starting in the mid-ninth century, large figures of the Mother of God, Christ, angels and saints were gradually introduced in the mosaics of the apse, south gallery, tympana of the north and south walls and over the imperial doors in the narthex (Mango 1962).² The reason I introduce this chronology is because the first decorative programme in Hagia Sophia did not compete or clash with the concept of the ‘performative image’, which functioned beyond anthropomorphic representation and was manifested as the body of the faithful in-spirited by divine *pneuma*.

The dome in Hagia Sophia plays an important role in centring the visual experience of the space. A comparison with the church of Santa Sabina in Rome built in 422–32 CE shows how the shoebox shape of basilicas engenders a dominant horizontal axis drawing the visitors’ eyes to the altar. By contrast, the introduction of the dome in Hagia Sophia counteracts the horizontal axis, giving a compelling vertical dimension (fig. 2). Covered in glittering gold mosaics, the cupola rises fifty-six metres above the ground, taller than any of the famous Gothic cathedrals of medieval France. Similarly, the enormous diameter of thirty-one metres creates the sensation of a limitless space expanding below its umbrella. The dome’s circular shape is echoed in the series of half-domes and exedrae, descending towards the floor.

¹ I have recorded this process of animation in a short video www.thesensualicon.com and explored it further in Pentcheva (2009: 223–34) and Pentcheva (2010: 121–54).

² For the most recent bibliography, see Teteriatnikov (2013).



■ Figure 2. Hagia Sophia, 532–537 and 562, interior, view of the dome.
Photo Bissera V. Pentcheva

⁵ All Old Testament texts are quoted from *Septuagint*.

³ On the acoustics of this phenomenon, see Weitze, Gade *et al.* (2002), Abel *et al.* (2010) and Abel, Woszczyk and Lezcano (2013). On the sonic rain and its relation to imperial acclamations, see Moran (2005).

⁴ I am currently writing a book on the subject; see Pentcheva (forthcoming).

The introduction of the dome not only creates an interior that transcends the rectangular box format of the typical basilica, but it also plays an important optical and acoustic role; it channels in a visual and an aural apex the intensity of reflected light and sound. In turn this concentration of visual and sonic energy in the dome is continuously released in a luminous synaesthetic 'shower' raining on the imperial and ecclesiastical elite assembled on the ground below (fig. 3) (Pentcheva 2014).³

A helical movement emerges in the complex fragmented views of the cupola, apses and exedrae. This optical experience is paired with an aural dimension. Sound propagating in this immense interior is paradoxically sensed here both as non-intimate and sonically enveloping. A single note chanted in this space is sustained for twelve seconds reverberation time (RT) before it dies below the threshold of audibility (30 dB) (Weitze *et al.* 2002; Abel *et al.* 2010; Pentcheva 2011: 93–111). We perceive such reverberant acoustics as 'wet' sound and in common parlance we characterize the building as 'live'. I will argue that it is exactly this synergy between human voice and architectural space that the acoustics and liturgy of Hagia Sophia activate, transforming both singers and congregation into 'performative images' of God. I will unfold this greater concept of iconicity of sound and space and human consciousness as it manifests itself in the singing of psalms in resonant acoustics (Pentcheva 2011: 93–111).⁴

ONTOLOGY OF THE PERFORMATIVE IMAGE AND THE PROCESS OF IN-SPIRITING

The origins of the performative image ('performative' because it is a product of ritual action executed in space), starts with Genesis (1:25–6), which outlines three terms: 'image', 'likeness' and 'the act of blessing'. Together they transform Adam into an 'image of God': 'Let us make man according to our image (*eikōn*) and likeness. And God made man, according to the image of God, male and female he made them and God blessed them.'⁵ Genesis 2:7 then adds the important information that Adam was made out of inert dust and he became animate only when God breathed into him: 'And God formed the man of dust of the earth and breathed upon his face the breath of life and the man became a living soul.' In Genesis 1:25–6 Adam is made according to the image and likeness of God and given life through the act of blessing; he is not a pictorial or sculptural representation. And in the second account, when God acts like a sculptor making Adam out of dust of earth, he animates his product by breathing into him. Together the two accounts form a definition of 'image of God' as the human being infused with divine breath through vital-inspiring and blessing.

It is this Old Testament model of 'image of God' as a product of the mouth, breathing and blessing that the Fathers of the Church, Basil of Caesarea (330–79), Gregory of Nyssa (335–95) and John Chrysostom (347–407), engaged (Vasiliu 2010: 115–28). These theologians addressed a Christian population with deep pagan roots. For them the Church Fathers strove to re-conceptualize fundamental concepts such as 'image', shifting its signification from representation to enactment. For instance, Basil of Caesarea quotes Genesis 1:25–6 in his Homilies X and XI 'On the Creation of the Human Being' (*De creatione hominis*), and writes how image/*eikōn* is the shape/form offered to humanity at Creation. It is likeness that needs to be earned and it is earned through human action and morality. He then juxtaposes this 'performative' *eikōn* produced by the faithful to the artefact made by the painter.

'Let us make the human being according to our image and likeness,' we possess the former through creation and the latter we acquire through our will. According to the first, we are given to be born in the *eikōn tou Theou*, but according to the will a being is formed in us according to the likeness of God. What the will reveals is that our nature possesses the force, but it is through action that we achieve [likeness]. In creating us, did not the Lord anticipate the precaution, saying 'create' and 'in likeness,' if he did not simultaneously give us the power to arrive at likeness and if it had not been our proper power through which we acquired likeness to God. And so God created us capable in power to achieve likeness of him. And given the power to model ourselves in a likeness of God, we are the artists producing likeness to God, eventually receiving the recompense for our efforts and unlike a portrait produced by the hand of the artist. In the end, the result of our likeness does not become a praise for someone else [some artist], created without purpose, but comes upon us. For in an icon, i.e., portrait, you do not praise the icon itself but you marvel at the painter who produced it. As opposed to I being the object of praise and not someone else, I have let myself become in likeness of God. In *eikōn* I have the rational essence and in likeness I become Christian.

(Basil of Caesarea: sect. 16, vv. 1–20)

Likeness is action defined by will – a process of becoming through which one arrives at a likeness to God. Likeness is inscribed in the structure of the living through the action of modelling. The success of this performance is determined by the strength of human will. The result – attaining likeness to God – is then the reason to shower the individual human being with praise. Basil separates the image as a human-made portrait modelling resemblance (that ultimately bestows praise on the skill of the artists to produce likeness) from *eikōn tou Theou*, which is the form God bestowed on humanity at Genesis. The faithful sustain their relationship to God by virtue of human will and the action of attaining a likeness to the divine. As such, the 'image of God' and likeness shower praise on the individual human being for his or her ability to sustain being Christian.

The patristic writers also identify the concept of 'image of God' with the sacraments. For instance, John Chrysostom applies the phrase

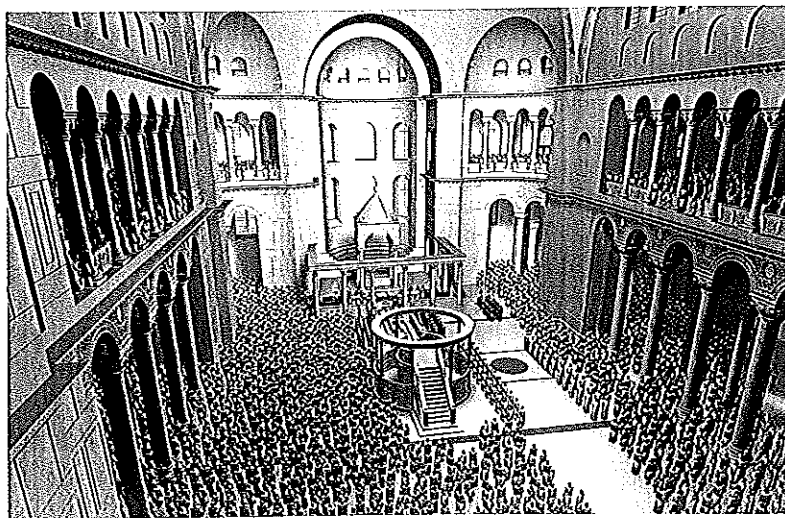
'image of God' to the ritual of marriage: 'Rather when they [the bride and groom] come together, they make not an inanimate icon (*apsychon eikōn*) or the image of an earthly creature, but the image of God himself' (Chrysostom, 1857, PG 62 col. 387C). The bride and groom produce an 'image of God', not a lifeless, inanimate artefact. The inanimate (*apsychos*) identifies the product of the artist's hand. By contrast, in coming together in Christ, the bride and groom form a living image of God, in which they recover albeit temporally a prelapsarian perfection. Essential here is the definition of the image through a performative paradigm; iconicity is ritually embodied and acted out and linked to an animate matter.

It is not surprising then to find the definition of the performative icon linked to the Eucharist. Moreover, it is this sacrament that explicitly manifests the in-spiriting role played by the Holy Ghost in transforming inanimate matter into the body and blood of Christ (Pseudo-Dionysius 1987 : ch. 2, part 3, sect. 8 (on Baptism); ch. 3, part 1, sect. 1 and ch. 3, part 3, sect. 7 (on the Eucharist); Taft (1980–1:45–76); Pentcheva (2010:17–44)). In the 740s the emperor Constantine V (741–75) wrote, 'An image (*eikōn*) of his [Christ's] body is the bread, which we accept, as it morphs into his flesh, so as to become a *typos* of his body' (Constantine V 1857 : PG 100 Col. 337B).⁶ The Holy Spirit as it descends brands matter, transforming the bread

⁶ See also Gero (1977:37–52) and Pentcheva (2010:57–96).

⁷ On *typōsis*, see Pentcheva (2010:28–36, 57–96).

Figure 3. Hagia Sophia, reconstruction of the Justinianic liturgy unfolding in the interior; the circular structure at the center is the ambo, where the elite choir would perform. © Lars Grobe, Oliver Hauck, Martin Kim Andreas Noback, Rudolf H.W. Stichel, Helge Svenshon, Technische Universität Darmstadt



into the body of Christ.⁷ The faithful then receive the Eucharist through their mouths and, in consuming it, they partake in the in-spiriting power of *pneuma* and by extension they become, albeit ephemerally, 'images of God'.

The cult of the stylite saints in the fifth century integrates both the 'performative image' produced by the descent of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist as well as the vital in-breathing of Adam in Genesis. The *stylites*, from *stylos* – pillar, were saints who lived on top of columns (see references to 'stylite' in Kazdhan (1991, III: 1,971); Brown (1971:80–101); Harvey (2006:186–96, 201–22); Lafontaine-Dosogne (1967); Van Den Ven (1962–70)). Their sanctity was manifested in the way that their bodies continually received the descent and in-dwelling of the Holy Ghost/*pneuma*. Concomitantly, they healed by exhaling this miraculous Holy *pneuma* through their own breath/*pneuma* (Harvey 2006:186–200; Pentcheva 2010:17–44). The following brief examples from the Life of St Symeon the Stylite the Younger (521–92) show the relationship between the Holy Spirit/*pneuma* and the stylite body, transforming the latter into an 'image of God':

And as he was praying, the Holy Spirit descended in his heart and filled him with wisdom and knowledge as the saint has demanded (Van Den Ven 1962–70:ch. 32).... For truly Symeon was the lamp of the Holy Spirit (ch. 34).... [A]nd holding the incense in his right hand, he offered it to God and suddenly like a flame the smoke of perfume rose up (ch. 37). Again some [people] brought before [the saint] a blind man and [Symeon] blowing towards [the blind man's] eyes, said: 'in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the son of God, acquire sight!' And immediately, straining his eye, [the blind man] started to see every one and raising his hands towards the sky, and he glorified God and his holy servant and for many years he was able to see the light (ch. 250).

Through prayer, the saint activates the descent of the Holy Spirit in his body. As a result, he can burn incense without the use of fire and by extension he can heal by exhaling divine *pneuma*. The stylite enacts the most compelling example of in-spiriting: he is himself in-spirited by Holy Spirit/*pneuma* and, on account of this,

his own breath/*pneuma* has the healing energy of the Holy Ghost. The *pneuma* coursing in his body transforms the stylite into an 'image of God'. To that end, another writer defending the 'performative icon', Pseudo-Leontius of Neapolis, identified as George of Cyprus in the eighth century, builds his concept of iconicity on the model of the stylite saint, whose body is continually in-spirited:

[A]n image of God is the human being who has transformed himself according to the image of God and especially the one who has received the dwelling of the Holy Spirit. I justly give honor to the image of the servants of God and veneration to the house of the Holy Spirit.[Thümmel 1992, 342⁸]

In this essentialist definition, 'image of God' emerges as the living body of the saint in which the Holy Spirit/*pneuma* resides. Furthermore, the perception of the stylite body as a house of the Holy Ghost unfolding in this text also enables us to recognize the spatial dimension of iconicity as a depository of *pneuma*: an interior made alive by in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit.

ICONS OF BREATH: CHANT AND THE EUCHARIST ON THE FEAST OF PENTECOST

The linkages between body, spirit and space evoked in Pseudo-Leontius's passage invite us to ask: what is the connection between an interior space with resonant acoustics whose modern definition is a 'live space' to its ritual function as a stage for the in-spiriting ritual of the Eucharist and finally to the chant that activates the resonant chamber and expresses through an exhalation of breath the mortal's gift to the divine? I will probe these interactions of bodies, buildings and breath by focusing on the music for Pentecost. The feast itself celebrates the historical descent of the Holy Ghost over the apostles, inspiring them to go and proselytize Christianity to the world. My focus in this section is on the communion verse, known as the *koinōnikon*, for Pentecost sung just before the distribution of the Eucharist. The musical setting is recorded in a thirteenth-century manuscript, *Grottaferrata MS Gr.* (I^o VII fols 67v–68). Despite

⁸ For the Greek, see Thümmel (1992:347).

The text of the *koinōnikon* is a variation on Ps 142 (143):10: 'Your good Spirit shall guide me [in the straight way], allēlouia.'⁹ The verse is, however, intercalated with non-semantic *ho, he, ha ngo, nge, nga, ne, a, ou, a*: τὸ πνεῦμα σου το χο χο ἀγα-γγα-θο- χου ο-γγο-ν, Κύριε, γγε χε χε, ό-γγο-δηγή-γγη-ησει με, α α α α ου α ου α α χα χα α ου α ἀ-λλε-ουε γγε ε νε ουε νε ουε να νε ε ε-λουί-α, γγα γγα.

In the past five years I have co-directed with Jonathan Abel (Stanford's Center for Computer Research in Music and Acoustics (CCRMA)) an interdisciplinary project entitled 'Icons of Sound' that explores the acoustics and aesthetics of Hagia Sophia, which merges approaches from the humanities and exact sciences (Abel *et al.* 2010, Pentcheva 2011). At Stanford, Abel developed a process through which to produce live auralizations; this means the singers can interact with the virtual model in the process of singing and experience the aural architecture (Abel, Woszczyk and Lezcano 2013). We collaborated further with Cappella Romana and auralized live in a virtual Hagia Sophia the two examples that this paper will draw on – the communion verse and psalm

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¹⁰ St Athanasius affirms the medieval interpretation of Ps 18 as a poetry in praise of Genesis (St Athanasius 1857: PG 27, cols. 12, 26).

¹¹ 2 ΟΙ ΟΥΡΑΝΟΙ
διηροῦνται δόξαν Θεοῦ,
ποίησιν δὲ χειρῶν αὐτοῦ
ἀναγγέλλει τὸ
στερέωμα. 3 ἡμέρα τῇ
ἡμέρᾳ ἐρεῖγεται ῥῆμα,
καὶ νύξ νυκτὶ ἀναγγέλλει
γνώσιν. 4 οὐκ εἰσὶ
λαλιὰ οὐδὲ λόγοι, ὧν
οὐχὶ ἀκούονται αἱ φωναὶ
αὐτῶν. 5 εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν
γῆν ἐξῆλθεν ὁ φθόγγος
αὐτῶν καὶ εἰς τὰ πέρατα
τῆς οἰκουμένης τὰ
ῥήματα αὐτῶν.

eighteen (nineteenth in the Latin Vulgate version of the Bible) sung at Pentecost in the Byzantine Great Church. It was during these live auralizations that the sonic manifestation of in-spiriting became discernable.

ENGENDERING OF THE SACRED: HUMAN CHANT AND COSMIC SOUND

While in the communion verse I focused on the agentive power of aspiratory sound, in my next example I will explore how the intercalated non-semantic combinations of sounds elicit a space in-between terrestrial and celestial: the *metaxu*. My focus is on the last antiphon (a psalmodic module starting with a prayer, followed by the singing of the psalm with refrains, a doxology and finishing with a repetition of the refrains) sung at Pentecost vespers (Conomos 1979: 453–69; Harris 1996: 333–47; Lingas 2013: 38–34). This antiphon is known as the ‘last one’ or *teleutaion*; it uses the verses of psalm eighteen (nineteen). Its musical setting is recorded in a manuscript, Florence, Bibliotheca Laurentiana, MS Gr. Ashburnhamensis 64, fols 258–64v, dating to 1289 (Høeg 1956: 8–39). Here I use Alexander Lingas’s (2013: 328–34) summary of the musical design of this piece and its performance by Cappella Romana (2006a).

The *teleutaion* starts with the prayer followed by the foundation melody A. Next comes the triple repetition of the refrain, ‘Allēlouia’ in variants B, C, D. This is then followed by the completion of the prayer. The verses of the psalm are sung next: each hemistich is set to melody A, completed with an ‘Allēlouia’ refrain set in a rotating basis to one of the variants B, C, D. The antiphon culminates in a doxology, using the musical setting of A and intercalating it with the repetition of the refrains ‘Allēlouia’ set to the variant melodies of B, C, D. The ritornello with variants of B, C and D ensures the repetition of an overall circular structure and the completion of the antiphon. Moreover, the circular structure of the music for this antiphon evokes the shape of the dome, semi-domes and exedrae inside Hagia Sophia (figs 4–5).

The verses of psalm eighteen (nineteenth in

the Vulgate edition) draw attention to the power of voice and speech both to glorify God’s Creation and to reproduce this creative act through sonic mirroring.¹⁰ The poem starts with the heavenly spheres and the firmament proclaiming the glory of God’s Creation, day after day, night after night: ‘The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims the work of his hands’ (Ps 18 (19):1). The verses continue with:

Day to day utters speech and night to night proclaims knowledge. There are no speeches or words, in which their voices are not heard. Their voice is gone out into all the earth and their words to the ends of the world.
(Ps 18:2–5)¹¹

One’s attention is brought to the action of speaking, uttering, pronouncing conveyed through a series of Greek synonyms. Speech and proclamation form the essence of the divine act of Creation. Yet they also feature prominently at Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descends on the apostles, pushing them to proclaim the word of God to the world. It is verse four that truly connects with the mission of Pentecost: ‘Their voice is gone out into all the earth and their words to the ends of the world’ (Ps 18 (19):5).

If the verses of psalm eighteen focus attention on the agentive power of voice and speech, then the festal refrain ‘Allēlouia’ ensures that the human action of praise is a mirror of the divine act of Creation. How is this sonically accomplished in the acoustic design of the *teleutaion*? Each refrain stretches the semantic chain of sounds composing ‘Allēlouia’ with a series of non-semantic letters and syllables. We have already encountered this practice in the singing of the *koinōnikon*. I have marked in bold these extra-semeiosic sounds in order to show how they blur the linear semantics of ‘Allēlouia’.

Variant B: Ἀχαουαχαουαλλεχεουεγγεεναν
ενεεελουνοῦαγγα (Choir)

Variant C: Ἀλλενανενεουενανελούνουα
(Choir)

Variant D: Ἀναουα αναουα αναουα
(Choir) Νεανες (Soloist) Ἀναλλεχεουεεεχεν
ουεχεουελούνουινια (Choir)

All three variants of the ritornello exhibit this practice of intercalating non-semantic syllables and vowels, but variant D carries this phenomenon to an extreme. Here 'Allēlouia' absorbs twenty-nine extra syllables. These sounds – *ha-*, *ou-*, *a-*, *e-*, *na-*, *ne-* – do not merge in a linear succession in order to form words; instead they obscure the meaning of 'Allēlouia', defying access to meaning. They challenge us to perceive the non-semantic sounds as a marker of what is beyond human speech.

Let us focus on just Ps 18:3 and its 'Allēlouia' in variant D: 'Day to day utters speech and night to night proclaims knowledge'. How can 'day' utter speech? How does night proclaim 'knowledge'? How is 'word' and 'knowledge' imagined beyond human speech? This is where the extra-semeiosic sound comes in in the form of the intercalated "Allelouia" – 'Αναουα αναουα αναουα 'Αναλλεχεουεενεχενεουε χεουελούνουϊνια (Choir).¹² The *ha-*, *ou-*, *a-*, *e-*, *he-na-*, *ne-* create presence without representation, evoke the music of the spheres without being the celestial bodies and reify the metaphysical without being the divine voice. The extra-semeiosic sounds thus transcend the semantics that are used to organize the ordinary affairs of humankind on Earth and commune with something larger and higher. In the way their intercalated presence stretches the semantic chains, they also invite the listener to cancel the pursuit of meaning. The resonant acoustics of Hagia Sophia, of twelve-seconds reverberation, further enhance this process of semantic blurring (Weitze *et al.* 2002; Pentcheva 2011:101–6). The *ha-*, *ou-*, *a-*, *e-*, *he-na-*, *ne-* creates an oneiric realm through sound.

The intercalated 'Allēlouia' refrains produce an intermingling of cosmic and human. In the process they release listener and performer from the constraints of gravity, propelling him or her to a helical ascent and soaring. Other important chants in Hagia Sophia, such as the *Cheroubikon* that accompany the bringing of the oblation to the altar, function in a similar way, severing gravity and inviting us to a space in-between celestial and terrestrial, the *metaxu* (Taft 1978, pp. 53–118. Schneider and Stichel

2003, pp. 377–94 and Pentcheva 2011: 104–7). The *Cheroubikon* asks us to 'forget our earthly worries' and join in the mirroring process, merging the earthly procession with celestial liturgy. Similarly, Maximus the Confessor (580–662 CE) in his *Mystagogia* speaks to this desired state of a gravity-free ascent:

he [God] will assimilate humanity to himself and elevate us to a position above all the heavens. It is to this exalted position that the natural magnitude of God's grace summons lowly humanity, out of a goodness that is infinite.

(Maximus the Confessor 2003, 116)

The melismatic chant and especially the process of intercalating non-semantic sounds constitute a recognized feature of the cathedral liturgy of Constantinople (Harris 1999:xi, 2–115; Conomos 1985:60–1; Troelsgaard 2011:85–6, 89). While musicologists have uncovered its presence, as an art historian I see in this process the creation of 'performative images of God'. The prosody introduces non-semantic registers, while the reverberant acoustics of Hagia Sophia further blur the semantic chains, foregrounding aural-visual experience over meaning. The sonic energy concentrates in the dome only to be scattered and diffused, building an enveloping sound field. The divine thus becomes sentient in a reverberant sound that functions outside of the register of intelligible human speech. The Byzantine rite of the Great Church thus validated sensual experience as a direct link to dwelling in the divine, enabling one to return, albeit ephemerally, to a state of being an 'image of God'.

¹² ἡμέρα τῇ ἡμέρᾳ
ἐρεῦγεται ῥῆμα, καὶ
νύξ νυκτὶ ἀναγγέλλει
γνώσιν (Ps 18:2).

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